

Thoughts on Team Captains (paraphrased from an article by Greg Shelley, Janssen Sports Leadership)

Talent is essential but on most days, talent is not enough. You also need good team leaders and captains who “buy in” to your ways of coaching and your system of training, who treat their teammates with respect and dignity, and who are willing to hold their teammates accountable. To consistently win, you will need team captains that demand the best from themselves, their teammates, and you.

Your captains should set the tone for practice, keep you and your staff informed, and model responsibility, decision-making, and a strong work ethic. You need captains who are willing to lead by example and hold their teammates to that example. In the end, your captains become the glue that bonds your team and keeps the team together through the good and bad times.

Good captainship is essential. But how do you go about identifying team captains? how do you know who will make the best captain? And how do you go about making sure the right person becomes captain?

Finding good captains is not easy. For starters, you might consider allowing your seniors to be captains. however, being a senior does not guarantee a good captain- leader. Even if one of your seniors turns out to be a good leader, you may end up with another senior who is not. And one bad captain-leader can be detrimental to your team.

Of course, you could select the captains yourself. While this is easy and you get who you want, you risk the possibility that your “selections” include players that are not respected or trusted by their teammates.

You could also have your players vote for team captains. Although this is how many captains are selected and it can work – all too often the selection process becomes a popularity vote based on “who likes who.” With this process, the most-liked teammates serve as team captains . . . but these individuals often lack the leader qualities necessary to be good captains. Furthermore, the most liked players generally have a hard time holding their good friends and teammates accountable. In short, a well-liked teammate does not equate to being a good team captain.

There is another option for selecting captains! how about having athletes “apply” for the captain job? That’s right. What if you wrote a captain job description and asked all interested athletes to apply for the job?

With this method, the athlete who applies for the captain job would have to be confident that he or she could effectively carry out all the outlined duties and responsibilities and believe they had the needed skills and qualifications to do so. You might also have each player on your team “nominate” one teammate who they think could fulfill the captain role (as it is defined and outlined in the job description).

With this method, the position, required roles, responsibilities, skills, and all the captain qualifications can be clearly outlined and discussed prior to any nomination process. You (the coach) can clarify what you want from your captains and your athletes can still have a voice in putting teammates’ names forward as possible team captains. In the end, you can “interview” your final candidates . . . and select the one or two athletes you feel will make the best captain(s).

The goal is to get your best leaders in the captain roles. Writing a captain job description and interviewing your best leaders can help you reach this goal. Below is an example of a captain job description to help you in creating a job description unique to your team needs and in-line with what you expect from your team leaders and captains.

TEAM CAPTAIN JOB DESCRIPTION

Job Title: TEAM CAPTAIN

Start/End Dates: start of season – end of season

Reports to: Head Coach

Position Purpose/Summary: Be a strong leader by example (one of the hardest workers on the team, displaying a high level of commitment, focus, intensity, passion, and effort) and strong vocal leader with good communication skills (one who will encourage, support, and positively hold all teammates accountable). The primary purpose of the TEAM CAPTAIN will be to positively influence teammates on-and-off the court/field/track.

Duties and Responsibilities:

The TEAM CAPTAIN will be expected to:

- Be on time to all team practices and team functions (at least 5-10 minutes early)
- Promote a positive attitude and positive team interactions - every day
- Provide a positive role model concerning commitment, intensity, confidence, response to mistakes, composure, hustle, and a “team first” focus
- Help settle team conflicts and be willing to confront and hold teammates accountable for their on-and-off court/field/track behaviors
- Work closely with and be the “point-person” for the head coach
- Encourage and support all teammates
- Lead the team throughout the season (in good and bad times)
- Perform other related team duties (as needed or requested by the coaching staff)

Working Conditions/Environment:

The TEAM CAPTAIN will be asked to perform his/her roles at all times. This includes situations when the team is not performing well, in the midst of a bad practice, when teammates are struggling to get along, and when coaches and/ or teammates are negative in what they say and how they interact with each other.

Essential Job Functions:

The TEAM CAPTAIN will be asked to:

- Be the hardest worker on the team (be the most committed/compelled)
- Model mental toughness by remaining confident and focused . . . and by responding to individual and team setbacks/mistakes in an appropriate manner
- Develop strong interpersonal and team relations (friendships)
- Provide energy and passion
- Compliment and support teammates
- Challenge teammates to get better and work harder
- Confront teammates’ negative attitudes, complaining, gossip, and lack of effort
- Refocus teammates when distracted

- Make good decisions (on-and-off the floor/field/court/track)
- Check in with the head coach

Abilities and Skills Needed:

- Passion and enthusiasm
- Energy and hard work
- Commitment to be the BEST
- Good verbal and nonverbal communication skills
- Strong character (good decision-making)
- Confidence and mental toughness
- Assertiveness (to do what is needed)
- Composure (to remain cool and calm under pressure)

Qualifications Required:

A willingness to go “outside your comfort zone” and push your teammates (and yourself) to a higher level of play . . . every day!

Applications / Nominations for TEAM CAPTAIN

If you are confident that you can consistently fulfill the duties and responsibilities of TEAM CAPTAIN and have the desire, skills, and abilities to do so . . . write your name here: _____

If you are confident that a teammate can consistently fulfill the duties and responsibilities of TEAM CAPTAIN and they have the desire, skills, and abilities to do so . . . write your teammate's name here: _____.